

THE  
ACTOR.

A  
POETICAL EPISTLE  
TO

*Bonnell Thornton, Esq;*

BY THE  
Rev. Mr. LORD, one of the  
Masters of *Westminster* School.

*Quocunque animum auditoris agunto.*

HOR:

---

THE THIRD EDITION.

---

L O N D O N:

Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY, in *Pall-mall*.  
And DUBLIN, re-printed for W. WHITE-  
STONE, in *Skinner-Row*. 1760.

21. 3. 6. 91

2. 09. 7. 101



HARVARD  
UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY

Harvard College Library,  
Robert W. Lowe Collection.  
Gift of John Drew,  
Feb. 5, 1903.

Benjamin Franklin

Rev. Mr. L. O. D. one of the  
Members of Washington School.

The Trustees

John O. D.

THE  
A C T O R.

**A**CTING, dear *Bonnell*, its Perfection  
 draws  
 From no Observance of mechanic Laws,  
 No settled Maxims of a fav'rite Stage,  
 No Rules deliver'd down from Age to Age,  
 Let Players mark them nicely as they will,  
 Can e'er entail hereditary Skill.  
 If 'mongst the humble Hearers of the Pit,  
 At some lov'd Play the old Man chance to sit,  
 Am I pleas'd more because 'twas acted so  
 By *Booth* and *Cibber* thirty Years ago?



The Mind recalls an Object held more dear,  
And hates the Copy that it comes so near.  
Why lov'd we *Wilks's* Air, *Booth's* nervous  
Tone ?

In them 'twas natural, 'twas all their own.  
A *Garrick's* Genius must our Wonder raise,  
But gives his Mimic no reflected Praise.  
Thrice happy Genius, whose unrival'd Name  
Shall live for ever in the Voice of Fame!  
'Tis thine to lead with more than magic  
Skill,

The Train of captive Passions at thy Will;  
To bid the bursting Tear spontaneous flow  
In the sweet Sense of sympathetic Woe.  
Through ev'ry Vein I feel a Chills creep,  
When Horrors such as thine have murder'd  
Sleep.

And at the old Man's Look and frantic Stare  
'Tis *Lear* alarms me, for I see him there.  
Nor yet confin'd to tragic Walks alone  
The comic Muse too claims thee for her  
own.

With



With each delightful Requisite to please,  
 Taste, Spirit, Judgment, Elegance, and Ease,  
 Familiar Nature forms thy only Rule,  
 From *Ranger's* Rake to *Drugger's* vacant Fool,  
 With Powers so pliant, and so various blest,  
 That what we see the last, we like the best.  
 Not idly pleas'd at Judgment's dear Expencc  
 But burst outrageous with the Laugh of Sense.

PERFECTION'S Top with weary Toil and  
 Pain

'Tis Genius only that can hope to gain.  
 The Play'r's Profession (tho' I hate the Phrase,  
 'Tis so *mechanic* in these modern Days)  
 Lies not in Trick, or Attitude, or Start,  
 Nature's true Knowledge is his only Art.  
 The strong-felt Passion bolts into the Face,  
 The Mind untouch'd, what is it but Grim-  
 mace?  
 To this one Standard make your just Appeal  
 Here lies the golden Secret; learn to FEEL.  
 Or Fool, or Monarch, happy, or distressed,  
 No Actor pleases that is not *possess'd*.

ONCE

ONCE on the Stage in *Rome's* declining Days,  
 When Christians were the Subject of their  
 Plays,  
 E're Persecution dropp'd her Iron Rod,  
 And Mortals wag'd an impious War with God,  
 An Actor flourish'd of no vulgar Fame,  
 Nature's Disciple, and *Genest* his Name.  
 A noble Object for his Skill he chose,  
 A Martyr dying midst insulting Foes.  
 Resign'd with Patience to Religion's Laws,  
 Yet braving Monarch's in his *Saviour's* Cause.  
 Fill'd with th' Idea of the sacred Part,  
 He felt a Zeal beyond the Reach of Art,  
 While Look and Voice, and Gesture all exprest  
 A kindred Ardour in the Player's Breast,  
 Till all the Flame thro' all his Bosom ran,  
 He lost the Actor and commenc'd the Man;  
 Profess'd the Faith, his pagan Gods denied,  
 And what he acted then, he after died. \*

THE

\* This Story is to be found in *Surius*, Vol. IV. The  
 Thing happened, in the Time of the Emperor *Dioclesian*,  
 who at first imagined the Actor only endeavouring to sustain  
 the Character he was representing; but being at length  
 convinced

THE Player's Province they but vainly try,  
 Who want these pow'rs *Deportment, Voice, and*  
*Eye.*

THE Critic Sight 'tis only *Grace* can please  
 No Figure charms us if it has not *Ease*.  
 There are who think the Stature all in all,  
 Nor like the Hero if he is not tall.  
 The feeling Sense all other Wants supplies,  
 I rate no Actor's Merit from his Size.  
 Superior Hight requires superior Grace,  
 And what's a Giant with a vacant Face?

THEATRIC Monarchs in their tragic Gait  
 Affect to mark the solemn Pace of State.  
 One Foot put forward in Position strong,  
 The other like its Vassal dragg'd along.

So  
 convinced of the Sincerity of his Conversion, he first ordered the new Christian to be put to the Torture, and afterwards to be beheaded; all which our Theatrical Martyr endured with the utmost Constancy. There is also in the *Martyrologia Romana* an Account of the two other Actors, named *Ardalcon* and *Porphyry*, who were converted in the same Manner upon the Stage.



So grave each Motion, so exact and slow,  
 Like Wooden Monarchs at a Puppet-Show.  
 The Mein delights us that has native Grace  
 But Affectation ill supplies its Place.

UNSKILFUL Actors like your mimic Apes,  
 Will writhe their Bodies in a thousand Shapes;  
 However foreign from the Poet's Art,  
 No tragic Hero but admires a Start.  
 What though unfeeling of the nervous Line,  
 Who but allows his *Attitude* is fine?  
 While a whole Minute equipoiz'd he stands,  
 Till Praise dismiss him with her echoing Hands.  
 Resolv'd, though Nature hate the tedious  
 Pause,  
 By Perseverance to extort Applause.  
 When *Romeo* sorrowing at his *Juliet's* Doom,  
 With eager Madness bursts the canvas Tomb,  
 The sudden Whirl, stretch'd Leg, and lifted  
 Staff,  
 Which please the Vulgar, make the Critic laugh.

To

To point the Passion's Force; and mark it  
well,

The proper Action Nature's Self will tell,  
No pleasing Pow'r's Distortions e'er express,  
And nicer Judgment always loaths Excess.  
In Sock or Buskin who o'erleaps the Bounds,  
Disgusts our Reason; and the Taste confounds.

Of all the Evils which the Stage molest  
I hate your Fool who overacts his Jest.  
Who Murders what the Poet finely writ,  
And like a Bungler haggles all his Wit,  
With Shrug, and Grin, and Gesture out of  
Place,  
And writes a foblish Comment with his Face.  
Old *Johnson* once, tho' *Cibber's* perter Vein,  
But meanly groupes him with a num'rous  
Train,  
With steady Face, and sober hum'rous Mein,  
Fill'd the strong Outlines of the comic Scene.

B

What

What was writ down, with decent Utterance  
spoke,

Betray'd no Symptom of the conscious Joke;  
The very Man in Look, in Voice, in Air,  
And though upon the Stage, he seem'd no  
Play'r.

The Word and Action should conjointly suit,  
But acting Words is labour too minute.

Grimace will ever lead the Judgment wrong,  
While sober Humour marks th' Impression  
strong.

Her proper Traits the fixt Attention hit,  
And bring me closer to the Poet's Wit;  
With her delighted o'er each Scene I go,  
Well-pleas'd, and not ashamed of being so.

'Tis not enough the *Voice* be found and  
clear,

'Tis Modulation that must charm the Ear.  
When desperate Heroines grieve with tedious  
Moan,

And whine their Sorrows in a fee-saw Tone;

The



The same soft Sounds of unimpassioned Woes  
Can only make the yawning Hearers doze.

THE Voice all Modes of Passion can express,  
That Marks the proper Word with proper  
Stress.

But none emphatic can that Actor call,  
Who lays an equal Emphasis on *all*.

SOME o'er the Tongue the labour'd Measures roll

Slow and delib'rate as the parting Toll,  
Point ev'ry Stop, mark ev'ry Pause so strong,  
Their Words like Stage-Processions stalk along.  
All Affectation but creates Disgust,  
And e'en in speaking *We* may seem too just.  
Nor proper, *Thornton*, can those Sounds appear  
Which bring not Numbers to thy nicer Ear;  
For them in vain the pleasing Measure flows  
Whose Recitation runs it all to Prose;  
Repeating what the Poet sets not down,  
The Verb disjointing from its friendly Noun.

While Pause, and Break, and Repetition join  
To make a Discord in each tuneful Line.

SOME placid Natures fill th' allotted Scene  
With lifeless Drone, insipid and serene;  
While others thunder ev'ry Couplet o'er,  
And almost crack your Ears with Rant and  
Roar.

In so much Noise but little Sense is found,  
As empty Barrels make the greatest Sound.

MORE Nature oft and finer strokes are  
shown,  
In the low Whisper than tempestuous Tone.  
And *Hamlet's* hollow Voice and fixt Amaze,  
More powerful Terror to the Mind conveys,  
Than he, who swell'd with big impetuous Rage,  
Bullies the bulky Phantom off the Stage.

THE Modes of Grief are not included all  
In the white Handkerchief and mournful  
Drawl;

A single Look more marks th' internal  
Woe,  
Than all the Windings of the lengthen'd  
Oh.

Up to the *Face* the quick Sensation flies,  
And darts its meaning from the speaking  
Eyes;  
Love, Transport, Madness, Anger, Scorn,  
Despair,  
And all the Passions, all the Soul is there.

In vain *Ophelia* gives her Flowrets round,  
And with her Straws fantastic strews the  
Ground;  
In vain now sings, now heaves the desp'rate  
Sigh,  
If Phrenzy fit not in the troubled Eye.  
In *Cibber's* Look commanding Sorrows speak,  
And call the Tear fast trick'ling down my  
Cheek.

He



HE who in Earnest studies o'er his Part  
 Will find true Nature cling about his Heart,  
 All from their Eyes impulsive Thought re-  
 veal,  
 And none can want Expression, who can  
 feel.

THERE is a Fault which stirs the Critic's  
 Rage,  
 A Want of due Attention on the Stage.  
 There have been Actors, and admir'd ones  
 too,  
 Whose Tongues wound up set forward from  
 their Cue.  
 In their own Speech who whine, or roar away,  
 Yet unconcern'd at what the rest may say.  
 Whose Eyes and Thoughts on diff'rent Objects  
 roam  
 Until the Prompter's Voice recall them home.

DIVEST

DIVEST yourself of Hearers if you can,  
 And strive to speak, and be the very Man.  
 Why should the well-bred Actor wish to know  
 Who sits above To-night, or who below.  
 So mid th' harmonious Tones of Grief or  
     Rage,  
 Italian Squallers oft disgrace the Stage,  
 When with a simp'ring Leer, and Bow pro-  
     found,  
 The squeaking *Cyrus* greets the Boxes round ;  
 Or proud *Mandane* of imperial Race,  
 Familiar drops a Curtsie to her Grace.

To suit the Dress demands the Actor's Art,  
 Yet there are those who over-dress the Part.  
 To some prescriptive Right gives settled Things,  
 Black Wigs to Murd'ers, feather'd Hats to  
     Kings.  
 But *Michel Cassio* might be drunk enough,  
 Tho' all his Features were not grim'd with  
     Snuff.

Why

Why shou'd *Pol Peachum* shine in fatten  
Cloaths?

Why ev'ry Devil dance in scarlet Hose?

BUT in Stage-Customs what offends me  
most

Is the Slip-door, and slowly-rising Ghost.

Tell me, nor count the Question too severe,

Why need the dismal powder'd Forms ap-  
pear?

WHEN chilling Horrors shake th' affrighted  
King,

And Guilt torments him with her Scorpion  
Sting;

When keenest Feelings at his Bosom pull,

And Fancy tells him that the Seat is full,

Why need the Ghost usurp the Monarch's  
Place,

To frighten Children with his mealy Face?

The



The King alone should form the Phantom  
there,  
And talk and tremble at the vacant Chair.

If *Belvidera* her lov'd Loss deplore,  
Why for twin Spectres bursts the yawning  
Floor?  
When with disorder'd Starts, and horrid  
Cries,  
She paints the murder'd Forms before her  
Eyes,  
And still pursues them with a frantic Stare :  
'Tis pregnant Madness brings the Visions  
there.

More instant Horror would enforce the Scene,  
If all her Shuddrings were at Shapes unseen.

POET and ACTOR thus with blendid Skill,  
Mould all our Passions to their instant Will ;

'Tis thus, when feeling *Garrick* treads th'  
Stage,

(The speaking Comment of his *Shakespear's*  
Page.)

Oft as I drink the Words with greedy Ears,  
I shake with Horror, or dissolve with Tears.

O ne'er may Folly seize the Throne of  
Taste,

Nor Dulness lay the Realms of Genius waste,  
No bouncing Crackers ape the Thundrer's  
Fire,

No Tumbler float upon the bending Wire.  
More natural Uses to the Stage belong,  
Than Tumblers, Monsters, Pantomime, or  
Song.

For other Purpose was that Spot design'd ;  
To purge the Passions and reform the Mind,  
To give to Nature all the Force of Art,  
And while it charms the Ear to mend the  
Heart.

*Thornton,*

*Thornton*, to Thee I dare with Truth commend,

The decent Stage as Virtue's natural Friend.  
 Tho' oft debas'd with Scenes profane and loose,  
 No Reason weighs against it's proper Use.  
 Tho' the lewd Priest his sacred Function shame,  
 Religion's perfect Law is still the same.

SHALL they who trace the Passions from  
 their Rise

Shew Scorn her Feitures, her own Image  
 Vice ;

Who teach the Mind it's proper Force to scan,  
 And hold the faithful Mirrour up to Man,  
 Shall their Profession e'er provoke Disdain,  
 Who stand the formost in the mortal Train?  
 Who lend Reflection all the Grace of Art,  
 And strike the Precept home upon the Heart.

YET, hapless Artist, tho' thy Skill can raise  
 The bursting Peal of universal Praise,



Tho' at thy Beck, Applause delighted stands,  
 And lifts *Briareus*' like her hundred Hands.  
 Know Fame awards Thee but a partial Breath,  
 Not all thy Talents brave the Stroke of Death.  
 Poets to Ages yet unborn appeal,  
 And latest Times th' eternal Nature feel.  
 Tho' blended here the Praise of Bard and  
 Play'r,  
 While more than Half becomes the Actor's  
 Share,  
 Relentless Death untwists the mingled Fame,  
 And sinks the Player in the Poet's Name.

THE pliant Muscles of the various Face,  
 The Mein that gave each Sentence Strength and  
 Grace,  
 The tuneful Voice, the Eye that spoke the  
 Mind,  
 Are gone, nor leave a single Trace behind.

F I N I S.